

# DAU Learning Resource Center Merges With David D. Acker Library

## Listening to the Customer Has Its Own Rewards

MYRNA BASS

### *From the Editor*

One of the most frequently used academic resources at the Defense Acquisition University — the Learning Resource Center — merged its computer lab and collection of videotapes, CDs, and other commercial training packages with the David D. Acker Library effective Aug. 10. Previously located in Building 208 on the DAU main Fort Belvoir campus, the LRC staff is now co-located with the Acker Library staff in Scott Hall, Building 226, Fort Belvoir, Va. First opened in 1989, the LRC was founded by Myrna Bass, who continued through the years as the LRC's director. Bass spoke to *Program Manager* about her 12 years with the Center and expectations for the future.

**A**s anyone can imagine, after starting this Center and nurturing it for so many years, it was initially hard to think of it merging with another Department. At first, I worried that someone would think that we had not done a good job. I now know that isn't true. I realize, as others have, that there will be fewer students on campus because of online training and, if they are in-residence, they will have less time to use the LRC. Our future students are being brought up on the Internet. They are the 16-year-olds who can program our Palm Pilots faster than we can "decide" to read the directions. So, it is again time to change and meet the needs of our students in a new way, where they live — on the Internet.

We opened and closed the LRC doors driven by a simple philosophy: *If we meet the customer's needs they will return.* We adopted the practice of previewing all

of our materials. In so doing, we knew which products to suggest to students and could better determine if those products should become part of the LRC's permanent collection. If we didn't have what students needed, we knew they would not return, since there was nothing to tie the LRC to the curriculum in the beginning.

If we were to be successful, we had to plan, benchmark, staff, and execute with pride and know what our customers wanted and needed. Toward that end, we benchmarked against JPMorgan on Wall Street, Sun Company in Pennsylvania, Steelcase Furniture in Michigan, National Security Agency, Central Intelligence Agency, and 11 others.

As our learner's needs changed, we needed to change. Over the years, we tried lunchtime videos, set up computer rooms in the Bachelor Officers' Quarters, and extended and shortened our hours, all while monitoring the results and discontinuing what was not working. We also had to adjust to the laws of supply and demand. In the last few years, vendor products changed. Companies started putting their efforts into Internet courses. It became increasingly difficult to find audio or video formats, so we found ourselves owning most of what was offered in lending formats. Meanwhile, the LRC products were getting older. So, it became time to change again.

While many assumed we only circulated training packages, we also tried to help students think through their perceived goals for improvement and get to their real needs, which may or may not have been the same. For example, one student's goal was to improve his management skills. When I asked him which skills — because as a GS-15 he certainly

must already possess some management skills — you could almost see the light bulb go on in his head.

Another student commented, "I'm just an ISTJ on the Myers-Briggs Instrument." I reminded him that he was a great engineer because he was an ISTJ, and remarked that if they asked me — an ENFP — to be an engineer, we'd all be in deep trouble. You could see the self-reflection and resultant pride that wasn't in his expression when he first entered the LRC.

Several students came realizing they needed to work on conflict and anger, but had previously never found the right means to deal with these issues. For many, it was the first time they had found not only a resource, but also the time and a safe environment in which to confront these issues — even though a number of these students were successful GS-14s and -15s.

### **The Personal Touch**

We also consulted with students on work-related communications issues that were apparent within their classroom teams. As we go global and our country diversifies, communications problems are inevitable due to our differing cultures. We are working more in integrated product teams, which presents more opportunities for cultural conflicts and misunderstandings. Working remotely at geographically separated locations will only serve to intensify the differences.

Teaching managers how to deal with these issues through remote learning will be a great challenge. These types of issues would seem to require personal interaction. Indeed, one might ask, "How will those who would benefit from



Myrna Bass (right), LRC Director, helps one of the many customers who visited the LRC each workday prior to its closing.

such training find the time, especially while at work in the very midst of their communications and conflict challenges?"

I believe these are not the kinds of skills one can easily learn online. The most profound lessons are those you learn about yourself from feedback and reflection, in marked contrast to computer training or flowcharting, which requires hands-on training and experience to effect change. In a future of increased online training, it is my sincere hope that those students who need more personalized communications training will find a venue that places emphasis on feedback, reflection, and personal interaction.

Some believe e-mail will be enough. I believe that eye contact, smiles, gestures, laughs, and so on are what give others the confidence that you believe in their success and the confidence to change their lives for the better. Five people can read the same message and get five different views as to what the communicator of that message is trying to convey. But when you add the tilt of your head and say "sure," then the communicator can see and hear you acknowledge that you're being challenged to reflect on what he or she has just said. That's where the *big* success comes with learners — when you get them to rethink their world from different angles. I don't think the Internet does that well.

### How Do You Measure Success?

Was the LRC successful? The data charts tracking usage and feedback have al-



Michelle McDonald, LRC Receptionist for the past nine years.

ways given us the highest ratings, but numbers can be deceiving. My truest "performance indicator" of the LRC's success was merely sitting on the front desk for 15 minutes and hearing students rave about the wealth of resources available, and how frustrated they were that they didn't have more time to use the Center.

Other performance measures were both tangible and intangible: the end-of-course surveys and the many compliments; the time all Department budgets were cut while the LRC's was raised; the many former students who begged to be able to use the LRC full-time instead of just on weekends as alumni; the faculty who used it on a regular basis; or even the people who called for advice on what to buy for their own start-up LRC. I'm confident we did a good job listening to our customers.

Why was the LRC successful? I believe it was because the students found the

latest packages here and got to choose what they thought they needed. The strongest motivation is wanting to learn. As Otto Kroeger says: "I cannot teach you anything you don't want to learn."

It was also because of the magnitude of support from faculty who advised students to use the LRC, reviewed many training packages, and suggested new items; students who advised us on whether they thought a training pack-

age was good; and the many DAU support Departments that kept us running smoothly with computers, signs, training, policy advice, staffing, contracts, videos, furniture repairs, cleaning, budgeting, and much more — all too numerous to mention.

The LRC was also certainly successful because of the staff who worked exceptionally hard to put customer needs first. Not only the present staff, but also others who now work in different Departments and still lent a hand whenever asked because they believed in what we were doing. I'd especially like to recognize and thank Michelle McDonald who put in nine years of running the front desk and was mentioned by *every* class for her great support; Lisa Johnson for her many years of hard work and good judgment; and Owen Gadenken for his wisdom in starting an LRC and giving me the opportunity to be a part of it. It took everyone to make the LRC an institution that successfully served its purpose — *in its time*.